Keeling Associates
Change for Learning

Middlebury College

"Directions" Alumni and Parent Survey Report

February 1, 2017
1-MDL-201601

www.KeelingAssociates.com | 55 Harry Kemp Way Provincetown, MA 02657 | Phone 212-229-4750

Introduction

Middlebury College (Middlebury; the institution) engaged in a year-long process of community dialogue, "Envisioning Middlebury," with all of the institution's locations, campuses, and constituents about Middlebury's future to provide the foundation for a strategic planning process that will occur this year.[1] The results of two surveys will inform that effort: the first, "Connections," implemented in Spring 2016, was designed to help map formal and informal networks among faculty and staff across the institituion; the second, "Directions," was implemented in Fall 2016 and centered around four open-ended, qualitative questions:

1. *List three words that you would use to describe Middlebury as you experience it.*
2. *Please describe the greatest strength that Middlebury should build on to ensure a bright future.*
3. *What is Middlebury's greatest challenge now?*
4. *Look into your crystal ball and predict one trend that will play out in higher education in the next 25 years. What is that trend and how might Middlebury best respond?*

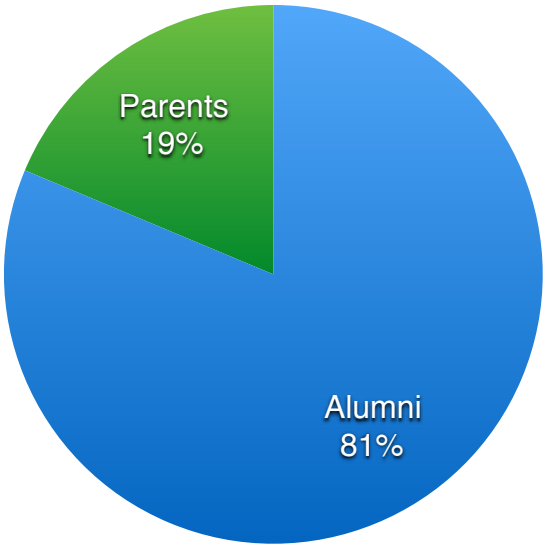
Following the administration of the survey to all on-campus constituents, the "Directions" survey was made available to alumni and parents in late Fall 2016; this report provides a summary of responses from those groups.

Survey Response and Response Rates

Middlebury received two hundred fourteen responses to the second administration of the "Directions" survey; 174 alumni and 40 parents responded to at least one question on the survey.

[1] Source: http://www.middlebury.edu/about/president/envisioning-middlebury.

Figure 1. Proportions of alumni and parent responses



Any and all alumni and parents were invited to participate through the following channels:

- Social media: a general link to the alumni survey was posted twice on Facebook (6,500 followers), twice on Twitter (1,321), and once on Instagram (900 followers).

- *MiddNews Alumni* is a monthly electronic newsletter sent to all academic program alumni and parents, a grand total of 37,096 recipients. The biggest group who received the newsletter were alumni of the College (N=22,175), followed by alumni of the Language Schools (N = 4,029) and Bread Loaf (N=1,502); non-degree alumni (N=1,938, combined for college, LS, and BLSE) also receive the newsletter. The total number of alumni of all types who were invited via the newsletter was 29,644.

- Parents—current, former, and prospective—were also invited to participate via the newsletter.[2]

[2] We assume the number of parents in all categories who received the newsletter *only in their role as parents* was 37,096-29,444 = 7,452. Some parents are also alums and would have been "counted" in the alumni groups.

Response Rate: The overall response rate—214/37,096 (using the denominator that accounts for recipients of the newsletter, to avoid duplication by also including followers on social media who might also have received the newsletter)—was exceedingly low: .6%, and the full completion rate, if calculated, would be far lower. It is therefore not possible to assume that the responses reported herein are in any way representative of the attitudes or opinions of all alumni or parents. This data is useful as anecdotal evidence, but we cannot be certain of its reliability; with such a low response rate, certain biases are likely to exist in the data and impact its usefulness and the ability to extrapolate to all alumni and parents. Still, the themes which emerged from these responses are generally consistent with findings from the on-campus constituents.

Summary of Survey Results

The following is a summary overview of prominent themes that emerged among the small number of responses from alumni and parents to each question of the "Directions" survey, as well as a comparison of themes across groups of constituents. Brief summaries of themes among responses to each question are followed by charts which compare the most frequently used codes in analyzing those responses across groups of respondents—faculty, staff, students, and alumni and parents[3]; commentaries are offered below the tables to highlight the most significant differences. A descriptive summary of the most prominent themes—across questions and across groups—concludes the report. The validity of all comparisons between responses from alumni and parents and those of the on-campus groups must be regarded as tentative and uncertain given the limitations described above.

Qualitative data were coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti®; results of the analysis were then summarized according to themes which emerged from the data, notably as relationships among codes. In this report, themes are presented in approximate order of frequency with which the codes that comprise those themes appeared in the data. For each question, a table follows the summary of themes which compares the top codes assigned to responses across groups of respondents. Quotations have been included within the summary to exemplify or illustrate themes that are representative of the thoughts shared by

[3] Responses to the alumni and parent survey have been aggregated for the purposes of this analysis.

multiple respondents; text in quotation marks represent the respondents' own words as shared in their responses, or excerpts of responses, to the survey. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses was maintained throughout the analysis of survey results.

Survey Results

Question 1: List three words that you would use to describe Middlebury as you experience it.

- Two hundred fourteen alumni and parents provided responses to Question 1. The most commonly cited themes among their responses are described below.

    - The largest proportions of responses to this question (20–25%) focused on each of the following thematic categories of words:

        - Academic excellence and rigor: Similar to those words used by faculty, staff, and students, these respondents described their experience as "academically challenging," "intellectually stimulating," "demanding," "inspiring," "invigorating," "vibrant," "enriching," and a "'Camelot' for thinkers"; respondents described students as "motivated," "bright," "thoughtful," "impassioned," and "brave," and faculty as "thought-provoking" and "intellectually stimulating." Others described the institution with a more entrepreneurial bent: "innovative," "inquiring," "creative," and "forward-thinking," and producing "lifelong learners." Some simply described Middlebury as "extraordinary," "unique," as well as "prestigious" and "having high standards." A few respondents additionally noted that with such high standards, Middlebury was "stressful" and "intense."

        - Student success: Respondents used words about supporting students' success through a strong sense of community—writing of the community as "friends," "family," or "home"—and engagement with faculty and peers; a few specifically noted that the institution was "inclusive." Alumni and parents described strong support networks that included engagement with faculty and peers, a feeling of "connectedness," and an "encouraging," "nurturing," "supportive," "empowering," "eye-opening," and "life-changing" environment

that helped the "transformation" and development of students. Alumni and parents also wrote of their experience of Middlebury as "safe," and "happy." A few wrote of the "small" size and used words such as "intimate," "cozy," "tight-knit," and "personal"; a very small number offered a more negative view of the size and described it as a "bubble."

- Campus environment: "Beautiful" was the single most frequently used word by respondents to Question 1 to describe Middlebury. They lauded the appeal of the "bucolic," "idyllic" setting, the ability to convene with and be active in nature, and the local Vermont community; respondents wrote of the "quiet," "serene," "calming," "peaceful" "haven" that the campus provides for students. Only a small number noted the "isolation" that comes with the beautiful location.

- Smaller proportions of respondents to Question 1 (less than 10%) wrote of each of the following themes:

  - Diversity and inclusion: These descriptions fell into two categories: (1) positive, as in "welcoming" and "inclusive," or (2) negative, such as "exclusive," "elitist," "segregated," "privileged," "homogeneous," and, less negative, "striving towards more diversity"; a slightly greater number wrote of the latter.

  - Progressive and liberal campus: Respondents noted that Middlebury is "liberal," "leftist," and "progressive," as well as "activist," "compassionate," "well-meaning," and "awake"; a small proportion of these responses bemoaned that the institution is "too liberal," "depressingly liberal," "anti-conservative," "overly PC," or "teaching a socialist agenda."

  - Evolving identity: Respondents wrote of Middlebury as a "forward-looking," "changing," "dynamic" institution and its "growth" and "hope." Some others noted the traditional, liberal arts roots of the institution and characterized the growth as "off-target," "inconsistent," and "disconnected," and noted that Middlebury "deserted its history" and has become a "colonizer."

- Access and financial sustainability: Respondents also wrote of Middlebury as "too expensive," "elitist," "aloof," "privileged," as well as "homogeneous," overlapping with those about the lack of socioeconomic and other diversity.

- Less than 5% of the words included in responses to Question 1 were related to each of the following additional themes:

  - The Middlebury "bubble"; "insular" and "disconnected"
  - Global, multicultural, and multilingual campus and programs
  - "Environmentally-friendly," "green," and "sustainable"; "outdoorsy" and "earthy"community
  - "Fun," "joyful," and "social"
  - "Open-minded," "liberating," and "free-thinking"[4]
  - Liberal arts; "well-rounded" students

Table 1. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 1, across all groups

Faculty	Staff	Students	Alumni and Parents
Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader
Inspiring, invigorating, passionate	Inspiring, invigorating, passionate	Inspiring, invigorating, passionate	Sense of community. student support
Stressful, intense, busy	Sense of community	Stressful, intense, busy	Idyllic, beautiful, nature, active community
Sense of community	Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Sense of community	Diversity and inclusion
Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Identity, evolving identity, growth versus tradition	Idyllic, beautiful, nature, active community	Progressive, liberal, activist

- While respondents across categories noted similar qualities to describe their Middlebury experience, particularly as related to the quality of the academic experience and the sense of community at Middlebury, a few notable differences included:

[4] Two respondents wrote the opposite, characterizing Middlebury as "closed-minded" and "narrow-minded."

- Faculty and staff described concerns about the growth and expansion of Middlebury, as well as the perception that the institution may be straying too far from its mission and/or history more frequently than students; while several respondents to the alumni and parent survey noted its growth and forward-looking nature, only a few suggested that growth was negative or "off-target."

- Students cited descriptions related to "elitism" and increasing diversity of all kinds, as well as improving support for diversity and inclusion on campus far more frequently than faculty or staff. Many respondents to the alumni and parent survey similarly wrote of elitism and a lack of diversity, as well as the need to improve accessibility to students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds; these alumni remembered a lack of diversity during their time on campus, as students still describe today, though some also wrote that the institution is inclusive.

- While several respondents across groups wrote of Middlebury as progressive and liberal, more alumni and parents noted such words and some wrote of the institution leaning too far left.

Question 2: Please describe the greatest strength that Middlebury should build on to ensure a bright future.

- One hundred eighty four alumni and parent respondents offered answers to Question 2. As with faculty, staff, and students, when citing Middlebury's strengths, alumni and parents reiterated many of the thoughts they shared in response to Question 1. The most commonly cited themes among the responses to Question 2 are detailed below:

  - More than 20% of alumni and parent responses to Question 2 focused on each of the following themes:

    - Academic excellence and rigor: Respondents wrote of the high academic quality, rigorous curriculum, exceptional students (described as intelligent, interesting, committed, and well-rounded), and talented faculty ("demanding yet flexible and supportive," "the heart of the Middlebury experience") as Middlebury's greatest strengths. Academics were described as "intellectually challenging," and the institution as providing "a world class liberal arts

education," "high standards," "commitment to rigorous inquiry," "honest pursuit of knowledge," and "path-breaking"; one responded wrote of "liberal arts education that encourages exploration over specialization." One alumnus wrote of "unparalleled dedication to excellence in all things, including (but not limited to) independent thinking, ethical interactions, and continuous improvement (local and global)." Another shared, "I flourished as a learner inside a climate of creative, innovative risk taking. Learning is not just cool at Middlebury—it's a wildly good time." Others wrote of Middlebury "taking talented students and providing them the inspiration to think big" and "an atmosphere that encourages students to learn and grow." Several respondents used this space to encourage the institution to increase the diversity of the student body—while maintaining such high quality.

- Support of student success: Respondents wrote of strong faculty-student relationships, but also the plentiful opportunities students have available to them, the abundant support students receive across campus, and the deep sense of community ("close-knit," "collaborative, non-competitive") that pervades the Middlebury experience. Respondents cited, "Allowing freedom and support for students to pursue their interests," "involving every student in a variety of learning experiences," and Middlebury's "commitment to creating a community where voices of the student-body are listened to, encouraged, and carried out into real change." A respondent described the nature of the campus community in greater detail: "its tight sense of community—with professors choosing to live close-by and host students for dinners; with staff members (including those in the dining hall and working for facilities) eager and receptive to meeting students; with students choosing to live, work, and eat on campus; with assignments that inevitably foster peers to become friends." Another suggested that Middlebury harness this quality to "foster dialogue and build community. Middlebury is a small school filled with diverse, intelligent and passionate people who have the ability to accomplish amazing things if they act with kindness and empathy."

- Diversity and inclusion: Comments related to diversity and inclusion either praised Middlebury for its diversity ("a safe space that could be expanded out into the world, or as a place that welcomes more people who need safe

spaces," "sense of local, national, and global communities; teaching listening and respect; encouraging various people to voice their opinions") or encouraged the institution to increase diversity of members of the community and support their success ("Middlebury needs to become more diverse, but with respect for that diversity," "more people of color, more students from low income families, more first-gen students—and we need to ensure that, once those people are on campus, they are given every possible resource and opportunity to succeed," "make everyone feel welcome, encourage kindness and difference"). Several respondents focused specifically on increasing the socioeconomic diversity of students and increasing accessibility—the need to "make Midd accessible and attractive to a variety of people." Others wrote of expanding the "diversity of ideas," fostering "genuine academic discourse—presenting multiple sides of an argument to promote critical thinking skills rather than a single, prescribed view," and maintaining an "open forum for discussion; free exchange of all ideas, not just [a] progressive agenda."

- Global perspectives and multiculturalism: Respondents wrote of Middlebury's "global reputation," "international perspectives," "global vision," "international ties and sensibilities," and "global community." Some wrote of preparing students for "global thinking and acting," while others suggested that Middlebury "continue teaching language and global issues to students," as well as "community engagement—in the local community and in the global community." Several specifically noted Middlebury's excellence as a leader and its "reputation of quality" in the language programs and "global stamp through languages, study abroad, and curriculum." While, some noted Middlebury's tradition of "building global citizens" and understanding "better than most the connectedness of the broader world," one respondent summed up the thoughts of several in laying out the following: "On a political level, Middlebury should help counteract xenophobia and small-mindedness. From a social perspective, Middlebury needs to be a place where anyone and everyone feels welcome. Academically, Middlebury should continue to guide its students to think big-picture about how societies, markets, and cultures interact for a more prosperous future."

- Fewer than 20% of respondents to Question 2 wrote of each of the following themes:

  - Preparation for life, career, and citizenship: Respondents wrote of the value of preparation for life after college provided by the liberal arts, in general—through training in skills such as communication and critical thinking—and Middlebury, in particular, by building "the kind of competence (not competition) in students that allows them to participate in the world in positive, community oriented ways," "teaching students how to learn…which sets them up for continuing growth," and "imparting not only academically rigorous lessons, but also a moral framework for intellectual exploration that emphasizes openness, global vision, and social and environmental responsibility." Others wrote of Middlebury's practical preparation of students; some stressed the combination of Middlebury's traditions and roots with experiential learning, citing "its tradition of liberal arts education, conjoined to education in practical skills."

  - Change and Middlebury's evolving identity: Respondents commented on Middlebury's need to focus on its liberal arts traditions in the coming years and "commit to the College, that is the core"; one wrote that the institution's greatest strength is its "sameness." Respondents criticized recent expansion and wrote that Middlebury "can't be everything," and, "all the other stuff is great, but non-essential." Others praised the institution for successfully blending "the old and the new" and the "humanities intersection with innovation." A few suggested "diversifying the curriculum to add more programs," and "to remember that education, like society, is constantly evolving."

  - Accessibility and financial sustainability: Respondents wrote of "helping those students who need financial aid to have the opportunity to attend such a great institution," and "more scholarships for bright students who can't afford college." A small number of respondents specifically noted "the endowment" as a strength, though some suggested a need to diversify "differentiated assets… and revenue streams."

- Fewer than 10% of respondents wrote comments related to each of the following themes:

- Commitment to the environment and environmental sustainability efforts
- Progressive and activist qualities whereby students are taught "how they can use their learned skills to make their own impact," but the institution also "encourage[s] questioning and exploration of new ideas, even disturbing and unfashionable ones."
- Campus environment, "idyllic location," and strong ties to the local community and the state of Vermont
- Alumni involvement, support, and the "network of students and alumni working together to make the world a better place."

Table 2. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 2, across all groups

Faculty	Staff	Students	Alumni and Parents
Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Global/globalization, international, multicultural	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader
Faculty quality	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Diversity	Sense of community, student quality, support
Global/globalization, international, multicultural	Diversity	Sense of community	Diversity
Language programs	Faculty quality	Language programs	Global/globalization, international, multicultural
Liberal arts	Student support, development	Student support, development	Preparation for life, career, and citizenship

- Faculty, staff, students, and alumni and parents wrote about similar strengths, though in differing proportions. While high proportions of all groups of respondents agreed that Middlebury offers a high quality, rigorous educational experience with "world class faculty" and a rigorous curriculum, they differed in how frequently they cited other key strengths.

- Many alumni and parent respondents to Question 2 shared comments, reminiscent of those from students, about the strong sense of community; this strength seems to stay with students and dominate their memories long past their days on campus.

- Alumni and parents wrote of the importance of global perspectives, though it was less frequently noted than several other strengths.

- Many more staff wrote of preparation for life, career, and citizenship than either faculty or students; most respondents to the alumni and parent survey who noted this theme wrote more generally of the value of the liberal arts in the preparation of students and equipping them for citizenship and working for social good; very few comments pertained to getting students jobs.

- Similar to responses to Question 1, students shared many more comments related to diversity and inclusion—and the need for improving both—than staff or faculty. Not surprisingly, alumni and parent comments mirrored those of students; they shared both their past impressions of inclusion and the (the lack of) diversity at Middlebury and their hopes for the future.

Question 3: *What is Middlebury's greatest challenge now?*

- One hundred seventy three alumni or parents provided responses to Question 3. The following were the most frequently recurring themes among their responses to this question:

    - Between 20–45% of alumni and parent respondents to Question 3 wrote of each of the following themes:

        - Accessibility and financial sustainability: Respondents wrote of challenges around affordability, the lack of socioeconomic diversity caused by high costs, and the need to build the institution's endowment to offset both costs and the lack of accessibility. Respondents wrote of a need "to make Middlebury available to students from all socio-economic levels, regardless of their backgrounds or ability to pay." Some respondents also questioned the value of

a Middlebury degree for the rising tuition costs; one asked, “What purpose does a $250,000 diploma serve? How are we ensuring the success of our graduates?” Respondents were concerned with maintaining high quality and standards while “remaining affordable” and increasing accessibility to more socioeconomically diverse students—achieving “academic excellence at an affordable price” and “providing democratic access to education to students who attend, getting rid of a culture of elitism, but without compromising on standards of academic excellence.” Similarly, respondents also commented on Middlebury “being too elite”—they wrote of “avoiding elitism, staying grounded,” “reckoning with [Middlebury’s] tradition of teaching primarily the elite,” and “changing the culture from that of regional elitism to that of a global, diverse powerhouse of emerging leadership.”

- Diversity and inclusion: Respondents wrote specifically of the need for greater diversity at Middlebury, as well as “remaining inclusive and open,” “providing students with a safe place in which to learn,” and “embracing diversity.” Others advocated, “Recruiting and welcoming a diverse faculty and student body” and “creating an inclusive and supportive community among the student body.” Respondents wrote of “recruiting and educating talented students from underrepresented socioeconomic, racial and ethnic families” and “not just getting these students to campus, but supporting them once they're there so that they can participate fully in the Middlebury experience.” Respondents noted the need to increase diversity of thought, as well, and improve students’ abilities and/or opportunities to engage with difference at Middlebury; one wrote, “Middlebury is a bubble for better or worse but encouraging students to engage with more ideas that challenge their own (and the accepted notions of the majority) and learn[ing] to discuss those at a higher level is critical.” Others were more critical, claiming “the school has fallen victim to PC culture and no longer provides its students with a well-rounded education,” and “diversity of thought is persecuted.” Respondents suggested, “Building bridges and supporting diverse thought. Reflecting diversity through its teaching staff, student population and curriculum”; “ensuring free speech (that is tolerant) is welcome and that diverse perspectives have a place to be heard and understood”; and the need to “foster spaces for all voices to be heard, while also pushing students to be upright global citizens.” Lastly, some shared a critique of not only Middlebury, but trends

in higher education that they feel "shelter" students from discomfort; one respondent asked, "Are we teaching kids both to win and to lose...with grace? Are we looking at opportunities to look at both sides of an issue, or are the professors biased in their professing?"

- Evolving identity and change: Respondents wrote of continuing to demonstrate and communicate the value and relevance of the liberal arts, despite "the growing perception among some that a liberal arts education is antiquated," "a world focused on technology," and a "world with increasing emphasis on an education that prepares students for a vocation." Respondents proposed resisting "fads" and urged Middlebury to "experiment with caution" and grow "without losing what makes Midd so special—that close knit community," or "cheapening the brand"; those commenting on recent expansions wrote of "silos" and "disconnected" parts. Respondents instead suggested, "Holding a steady course," "maintaining the liberal arts traditions," and the need to continually "refresh and re-articulate our understanding of the value of a liberal arts education, not only its extrinsic value (how it might benefit a career even if indirectly) but its intrinsic value (how it broadens and enriches one's experience of life)." Some also suggested "students, parents and other members of the Middlebury community need to find better ways of translating the learning that takes place in class into clearly applicable skills."

- Fewer than 20% of alumni and parent responses to Question 3 incorporated each of the following themes:

  - Preparation for life, career, and citizenship: Respondents wrote of the need to expose students to experiential learning experiences ("helping graduates apply what they've learned to the real world"), "developing programs to help students face their fears, gain resilience, and strengthen their ability to speak out constructively," and explicitly communicate the value of a liberal arts education in preparing students for careers and citizenship. Others wrote of "staying relevant" by "engaging with alumni in fields that students would like to pursue," "making sure the courses taught are the right ones for students' future careers," and increasing "internships and other career track boosts, so our graduates can leap into earning salaries."

- Supporting student success: Respondents wrote of ways the institution could better support the success of students, from "ensuring a fun and engaging collegiate experience," to providing students with "a safe place to learn," and "guiding principles—not hold their hand—and be willing to let them learn from their mistakes while living in a supportive environment." Others wrote of the need to "maintain intellectual rigor while also giving students time to stay physically and emotionally healthy, to reach out to others, and to give back."

- The sheltered Middlebury "bubble": A few respondents criticized Middlebury for being "too far-removed from 'real world' problems." One alumnus noted, "While Middlebury's closed campus and tight-knit community help students academically, the community can be too insular."

Table 7. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 3, across all groups

Faculty	Staff	Students	Alumni and Parents
Financial sustainability	Financial sustainability	Diversity	Affordability, financial aid, access
Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Identity/evolving identity, growth	Inclusion, social justice, welcoming	Diversity and inclusion
Identity/evolving identity, growth	Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Affordability, financial aid, access	Engaging difference, diversity of thought
Diversity	Affordability, financial aid, access	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Identity/evolving identity, growth
Affordability, financial aid, access	Diversity	Enrollment, recruitment, retention	Preparation for life, career, and citizenship

- Faculty, staff, students, and alumni and parents all wrote of the challenges facing the institution related to increasing diversity and inclusion, increasing affordability and access, maintaining quality in the face of rising costs, and providing students with adequate preparation for careers, life, and citizenship. There were several other challenges in which the groups differed on how frequently they were noted, if at all.

- Though all noted the need to increase diversity of all kinds across campus, students, alumni, and parents noted this challenge more often than faculty and staff; both students and faculty, though, noted the need to "engage across difference" and "finding a balance" between "managing aggressions" and teaching students to have a "thick skin." Respondents to the alumni and parent survey similarly noted the challenge of a lack of diversity of thought and a need to increase open-mindedness, in particular to non-liberal perspectives.

- As opposed to staff and (to a lesser extent) faculty, almost no students wrote of challenges related to the financial sustainability of Middlebury; student, alumni, and parent comments related mostly to affordability, financial aid, and increasing access to socioeconomically diverse groups of students.

- Respondents to the alumni and parent survey focused mostly on upholding the value and relevance of the liberal arts traditions of Middlebury, and few offered comments in support of growth or continued expansion; on the contrary, staff had commented extensively on this subject.

- Students provided more than twice as many responses related to supporting student success than faculty, with staff in between, but focused on stress among students, while respondents to the alumni and parent survey wrote of supporting students' learning, success, and preparation for life after graduation, with little attention to stress.

Question 4: *Look into your crystal ball and predict one trend that will play out in higher education in the next 25 years. What is that trend and how might Middlebury best respond?*

- One hundred sixty six respondents answered Question 4. The most frequently noted themes among alumni and parent responses to this question are described below.

    - More than 25% of alumni and parent responses to question 4 described each of the following trends and responses:

        - Accessibility and financial sustainability: The largest proportion of responses to this question described trends related to "keeping costs under control,"

increasing the endowment, and increasing access to those students "of a diverse socioeconomic background"—while preserving quality and the "Middlebury brand." Respondents agreed Middlebury must "keep the amazing quality of life and community feel it has, while stopping (or even better, reversing!) the tuition increase," and "identify solutions that will reduce the cost of tuition without sacrificing the magic of a small, expensive liberal arts college experience." Respondents suggested that Middlebury raise "money by the bucket load," make the "financial aid process more transparent," "take poverty seriously and provide hope," and most importantly, prove its value by providing "a clear premium in terms of the civic and intellectual preparation of their students and their ability to emerge as leaders across disciplines AND across geographies" and "education that is not based in a trade, but based in the development of the mind." A few noted the impact of rising costs on financial sustainability: "We will have to attack the rising costs to have such institutions as Middlebury remain sustainable. A tough road ahead."

- Evolving identity and change: Respondents wrote about the trend of change away from Middlebury's traditions and roots, including an evolving identity, changes in pedagogy, integration of technology, and communicating the continued relevance of the liberal arts in "preparing [students] to be creative thinkers, collaborative teammates, and critical consumers of information." They argued against anticipated changes which will "continue to erode traditional classroom presence" and make "brick and mortar obsolete," and for changing thoughtfully, as necessary, with attention to preserving the "soul of the college" and not "compromising some of the wonderful qualities that make Middlebury what it is—the time spent with other students, the personal contact with great educators, and the incredible setting." One respondent advised, "Zag, don't zig when it comes to the computer age. Keep teaching people to create and synthesize with their own bodies and brains. Revolt against the machine if/when possible." Others agreed that Middlebury should "stay the course" and "recommit to core values in education at the same time that you explore new technologies and areas. Don't give up on students' ability to truly think, be creative, solve problems, take in knowledge, produce knowledge." Despite these concerns, some respondents suggested increasing "technology education," coursework and training in computers and data science to prepare

"students for a world in which tech plays a huge role." Several respondents also noted changes in higher education, in general, pertaining to how education will be delivered; respondents wrote of maintaining what is great about Middlebury but offering "more avenues to achieve it" and "seek ways to open its doors via online education to other communities of learners."

- Preparation for life, careers, and citizenship: Respondents also wrote about greater preparation of students for life after graduation; many of these comments were related to the value of the liberal arts in such preparation "while balancing work force challenges," and competing against lower-cost alternatives. Respondents wrote of the trends toward "online, applied, and careerist education" and "co-op education (learn/intern/learn/intern)"; yet, others wrote that "Middlebury can best respond by sitting this trend out" and take heart in "being a niche throwback where thinking and mindfulness reigns and the experience is as important as any specific content." Still, several respondents wrote of the need to emphasize "a well rounded experiential education," "helping students seek experiences in the broader socio-economic world and then apply it," "improved relationships and network with key employers, to provide both job placement as well as experiential learning and mentorship opportunities," engagement with "local and global communities with goals to collaborate," "more links to industry (more classes like MiddCORE) and general life skills (e.g., how to pay taxes)," training in "creative problem solving," "career transition support of a more hands-on nature," and "a clear premium in terms of the civic and intellectual preparation of their students and their ability to emerge as leaders across disciplines AND across geographies."

- Diversity and inclusion: Respondents wrote of the continuing trend of increasing diversity—racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic. Closely tied to issues of affordability and access, they wrote of creating "better opportunities for all students to attend Middlebury" and the need to "increase financial aid packages, recruit more widely, commit to faculty of color," as well as push forward on improving inclusion hand-in-hand with greater diversity. Another wrote of the influx of international students and the need to "assimilate them into the Middlebury environment." Others wrote of generally supporting a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere for diverse students; one agreed, "Identity

politics around race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc. will only become more pronounced. It can be divisive, but Middlebury must be inclusive and protective." Respondents also wrote of the lack of engagement with difference and "viewing the whole world from many angles," the predominance of a single progressive doctrine, and an "overly PC" atmosphere at Middlebury, fearing it is a trend; one shared, "I fear that the current political and social landscape promotes a single-minded ideal and prevents creative thinking…hear my fear that [students] are losing the ability to ask questions to expand our understanding if there is no room for genuine curiosity or naiveté." Others agreed that "political correctness will cause MEANINGFUL debate to end."

- Between 10–20% of alumni and parent respondents wrote of each of the following themes in response to question 4:

  - Academic excellence and rigor: Respondents wrote of trends related to maintaining high quality standards, students, faculty, and programs of study.

  - Support for student success: Respondents noted the need to maintain the "wonderful personal atmosphere and individualized approach to academic and other important parts of the Middlebury culture," despite the trend of greater student "independence," whereby curricula are "student driven" with "more individualized courses of study, with student-designed majors." Respondents additionally wrote of providing additional support for students, including increased counseling and mentoring, greater attention to balancing work and wellness, and, as one alumnus specifically noted, "Greater focus on responding to sexual assault on campus." A few noted that providing support does not mean "coddling"; one explained, "Kids are stressed out, hoop jumpers and afraid to take risks. So many seem focused on the end result (getting into college) vs the process of learning/education/building curiosity, taking risks."

  - Global perspectives and multiculturalism: Respondents were split as to whether the world will become more globalized and connected or "centralized" with "reduced globalization"; regardless, they strongly voiced the need to "keep engaging with local and global communities," prepare students "to function in multi culture and multi lingual environments," maintain strengths in language

programs, and uphold "cultural awareness," "global perspectives, and understanding" as core assets of Middlebury graduates. To this effect, one alumnus wrote that the world "will need the combined wisdom, experience, and deep thinking from every culture to thrive. Middlebury has a strong foundation as a global college. Press on with this advantage. Show how it's done and what it produces. Continue to ensure that every move is toward excellence."

Table 8. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 4, across groups

Faculty	Staff	Students	Alumni and Parents
Technology, digital learning	Technology, digital learning	Affordability, financial aid, access	Affordability, financial aid, access
Preparation for life, career, and citizenship	Affordability, financial aid, access	Technology, digital learning	Identity/evolving identity, growth
Experiential, immersive learning	Preparation for life, career, and citizenship	Diversity	Preparation for life, career, and citizenship
Affordability, financial aid, access	Diversity	Preparation for life, career, and citizenship	Diversity
Diversity	Value	Inclusion, social justice, welcoming	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader

- While respondents to the alumni and parent survey, like those on campus, noted important trends related to technology and online learning, they focused more closely on maintaining key qualities related to Middlebury's identity and the liberal arts, as well as issues of affordability and increasing access and diversity.

  - Staff, students, alumni, and parents noted the significance of trends related to affordability, access, and adequately supporting students more frequently than faculty.

  - Staff, students, alumni, and parents also wrote more frequently than faculty about trends related to increasing diversity, multiculturalism, and support for diversity, especially socioeconomic diversity, affordability, and access.

- Similar to comments made in response to earlier questions, several respondents to the alumni and parent survey used this space again to express concerns related to the engagement with and appreciation of difference, particularly political differences.

Summary

Though in varying frequencies, the same overarching themes consistently emerged across all of the questions in the "Directions" survey and across groups of constituents—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and parents.[5] Briefly, these recurring themes include the following:

- The rigor and quality of education at Middlebury was a consistent and widespread theme in describing its strengths. Many wrote of intellectually challenging, inspiring, innovative, and engaging teaching, learning, and scholarship. Like faculty, staff, and students, alumni and parents highlighted the excellence of faculty, caliber of students, and unique and demanding programs. Respondents to the on-campus and alumni and parent survey noted the challenge of maintaining quality in the face of rising costs, increasing diversity, and incorporating technology into an evolving pedagogy.

- Respondents expressed frustrations and concerns over the tension between the small, liberal arts traditions and expansive growth of the institution, both in the recent past and near future. The growth was described by many in the on-campus survey as an overcommitment, "unfocused," "contrived," and "bloated." Relative to other groups, alumni and parents focused less on expansion than on the need to "stay the course."

- A large number of respondents shared thoughts related to increasing and supporting diversity and inclusion across Middlebury. Respondents to both the on-campus survey and the alumni and parent survey characterized Middlebury as "elitist" or "exclusive" and noted the need to increase diversity of all constituents, but especially students along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, geography, and, importantly, socioeconomic status. All groups saw increasing diversity as necessary, but alumni and parents especially stressed the need to uphold quality at the same time. Both on-campus respondents and alumni and parents suggested that greater equity, inclusion, and "engagement across differences" must accompany greater diversity.

[5] This summary is an amended version of that which was prepared as part of the on-campus survey report.

- Respondents to both the on-campus and the alumni and parent survey noted the importance of supporting the success of all students, both inside and outside the classroom, and through the strong sense of community that, for many, is a signature element of the Middlebury experience. Though responses to both surveys described the intimacy of the institution as contributing to a caring and engaging environment, some complained of the "insular," "sheltered" nature of the "Middlebury bubble."

- The preparation of students for lives and careers was cited by both on-campus and alumni and parent survey respondents as, notably, both a challenge and trend. Respondents described the benefits of a Middlebury experience and defended the relevance of the liberal arts in providing students with the foundations they need for life, careers, and citizenship: global perspectives, language training, critical thinking skills, appreciation for diversity, and hands-on and immersive learning experiences. Still, a large number of on-campus respondents questioned if and how to remain true to the core of the mission and history of the institution while providing students with practical and professional preparation—and competing with institutions explicitly touting vocational training. As compared to other groups, alumni and parents were less unsure about how the liberal arts prepares students for life after college and provided many examples of its value.

- Issues of financial sustainability and access were commonly cited by on-campus and alumni and parent respondents as challenges and trends. Predominantly faculty and staff noted the former and students, alumni, and parents focused on the related concerns of increasing costs, financial aid, and accessibility to a larger range of socioeconomically diverse students; in sum, "Paying for [Middlebury's] vision and making it affordable to a diverse student body." Respondents to the on-campus survey wrote of "bloat" and growth contributing to an unsustainable model that may find itself unable to offer aid to the diverse students it hopes to attract. Alumni and parents rarely mentioned financial sustainability in their responses to the survey; respondents wrote more frequently of concerns about rising costs, the influx of technology, and the increasing availability of alternative means of completing degrees as reasons to uphold the unique, high quality, and "high touch" nature of a Middlebury education.